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ABSTRACT

A collaborative effort by the College Board, Educational Testing Service, and Hispanic Higher Education Coalition resulted in a test-familiarization pilot kit--"Preparing for PSAT/NMSQT for Hispanic High School Students." The kit contains practice tests for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), 22 lesson plans that cover test-taking skills, and a review of selected mathematics and English grammar concepts. This report provides some information concerning the reactions of 127 high school students and eight counselors and teachers to a pilot version of the kit. Sixty-six of the students were Hispanic, and 85 were female. Focus was on obtaining, via questionnaires, the perceptions of the extent to which the kit was helpful. In addition to describing the kit and its use in a number of school districts over the past year, two key questions are addressed; these questions involve the effectiveness of the kit in increasing student confidence and reducing test anxiety and the effect of the kit on the likelihood of students taking the two tests. The project did not constitute a rigorous experimental evaluation of how the kit affected student attitudes or posttreatment test scores. Most targeted school districts were in California, where the Tanner Act provided funding for demonstration sites to help disadvantaged students become more familiar with college admissions tests. It was not possible to separate the effects of the kit from the effects of other preparatory activities. The Teacher/Counselor Questionnaire and the Student Questionnaire are appended. (TJH)

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An Evaluation of a Kit to Prepare Hispanic Students for the PSAT/NMSQT

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Donald E. Powers
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CONTENTS

Abstract 1

Description of the Kit 1

Method 1

Results 2
- Site Visits 2
- Evaluations by Counselors and Teachers 3
- Evaluations by Students 4

Discussion 10

Summary and Conclusions 11

Tables

1. Breakdown of Sample by Grade and Gender 4

2. Breakdown of Sample by Race/Ethnicity and Language Background 5

3. Cross-Tabulation of Likelihood of Taking PSAT/NMSQT before and after Exposure to Test-Preparation Kit 6

Charts

1. Percentage of Total Sample Who Knew Content Areas before Exposure to Kit 7

2. Mean Ratings by Item for Total Sample 8

3. Mean Ratings of Each Item by Students for Whom the Material Was New 8

4. Means and Standard Deviations of Scales Corresponding to Different Content Areas by Grade Level, Language Background, and Race/Ethnicity 9

Appendixes

A. The Teacher/Counselor Questionnaire 13

B. The Student Questionnaire 17

ABSTRACT

A collaborative effort to improve access to college for Hispanic youth on the part of the College Board, Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition resulted in a test-familiarization pilot kit titled *Preparing for the PSAT/NMSQT for Hispanic High School Students*. The kit contains practice tests for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, 22 lesson plans that cover test-taking skills, and a review of selected mathematics and English grammar concepts. The kit was designed to facilitate formal instruction by counselors and teachers at the junior and senior high school levels. It can also be used in college recruitment programs to help disadvantaged students prepare for other college admissions tests like the SAT. The current version is now titled *Testskills: For Teachers of Hispanic Students*.

This report is meant to provide some modest information about students' and teachers' reactions to a pilot version of the kit. In addition to describing the kit and how it was used in a number of school districts over the past year, we look at two key questions: (1) whether the test-familiarization kit increased students' confidence and lessened their anxiety about test-taking, and (2) whether the kit increased the likelihood that students would take the PSAT/NMSQT.

The project outlined here was not intended to be a rigorous experimental evaluation of how the kit affected student attitudes or posttreatment test scores. An evaluation of this nature would require control groups and standardized instruction across sites. In the present project, it was not possible to control design of the programs or how the kit was used.

Most targeted school districts were in California, where recent legislation (the Tanner Act) provided funding for demonstration sites to help disadvantaged students become more familiar with college admissions tests. These districts designed their own programs and, in addition to using the kit, incorporated other activities related to test preparation. Thus, it was not possible to separate the effects of the kit from the effects of the other activities. Therefore, the emphasis of this evaluation is on *perceptions* of the extent to which the kit was helpful. This information may have some value for refining the kit as new editions are produced and for helping to inform potential users of ways the kit may be used most effectively.

DESCRIPTION OF THE KIT

The kit is largely based on material already available to most schools and test-takers. However, in some respects, the kit goes beyond the materials available to date. Lesson plans in the kit facilitate classroom instruction, involve multiple practice tests, and include units on reducing test anxiety and using knowledge of Spanish cognates.

It takes about 45 minutes to present each of the 22 lesson plans. Each plan describes the lesson objectives and lists the handouts, other materials, and steps required to prepare and present the lesson. A content summary and a list of procedures for working through the materials are also provided for each lesson. The lessons cover such topics as PSAT/NMSQT format, general information about test-taking, answer-sheet familiarization, and cognates. Four lessons involve answering several kinds of questions based on reading passages, two concern verbal analogy problems, and one deals with sentence completion items. The six lessons devoted to mathematics involve reviewing math concepts, discussing strategies for the regular mathematics and quantitative comparison items, and, through "quick tests," evaluating the need for additional review. Students apply what they have learned by taking either the verbal or mathematical sections of simulated PSAT/NMSQTs in two other lesson periods. Performance on each of these sections is reviewed in two subsequent lessons. A final supplementary session includes suggestions for dealing with test anxiety.

As described in the kit's statement of objectives, these lessons are designed to help students:

- understand the testing process and how to prepare physically and mentally for a test
- learn general strategies for test-taking, including time management, following directions, guessing, changing answers, and handling test anxiety
- understand and respond efficiently to each of several kinds of PSAT/NMSQT questions, and
- better understand their PSAT/NMSQT test scores.

METHOD

When the project was initiated, the kit was being used in over a dozen school districts in California and in Hartford, Connecticut, and it seemed likely, in light of the substantial interest in the kit, that more districts would adopt it. For evaluation purposes, we proposed selecting three districts that were currently using the kit, two in California and the other in Hartford. The California districts were selected from those that had received grants under the Tanner Act, which provided funding for projects designed to increase college admissions test-taking and subsequent enrollment of traditionally underrepresented students. The California districts were selected after a perusal of the program descriptions they provided when applying for Tanner funding, and because of the predominance of Mexican American

students. The Hartford, Connecticut, district was chosen because of its large Puerto Rican student population. As data collection proceeded, two additional California districts were included in the study. Districts selected included both urban and rural areas.

Eight staff members who had worked with the kit (at least one at each of the five different sites) responded to our survey on how the kit was used. These educators were asked for their perceptions of the effects of the kit, particularly whether or not it affected the likelihood that participating students would eventually take the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT. The questions were organized around the objectives of the various lesson plans in the kit. (Appendix A contains the questionnaire.)

The kit was intended to be flexible enough to be used in a variety of different contexts. Hence, documenting the characteristics of these programs was an important part of the evaluation because, it was thought, the kit might be perceived as more useful in some contexts than in others.

The first task was to read the proposals that districts had submitted to obtain funding under the Tanner Act. This reading suggested significant variation among test-preparation programs with respect to instructional objectives, characteristics and duration of components, and characteristics of students and schools (e.g., grade level, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and proportion of minority students in the school).

Because there is seldom perfect correspondence between what is proposed and what is implemented, each of the California districts was visited by one of the authors; another author visited the Hartford District. These visits provided information on the actual operation of the programs, particularly with respect to any unique characteristics.

A brief questionnaire, shown in Appendix B, was also developed for administration to participating students. Topics included whether (*a*) students became more confident and less anxious about test-taking, (*b*) they became more aware of appropriate procedures for test-taking, and (*c*) they were likely to take the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT in the future. Again, to the extent possible, reactions to the various lessons in the kit were solicited.

RESULTS

Site Visits

The site visits helped the authors identify ways the kit was used.

At Hartford, discussions with counselors, program coordinators, and teachers revealed a number of interesting facts about the program and the school district. For example, the district includes three high schools that differ in the degree of their academic orientation. As a rule, relatively few students in the Hartford School District enroll in four-year colleges and, according to school officials, many of these are first-generation college students. A majority of students, even the most academically able, were described as being more job-oriented than academics oriented. As one counselor put it, "the SAT is foreign to this environment; it's a suburban type thing." Relatively few students in the district take the SAT, and average test scores are relatively low (in the mid 300s on each section of the test).

The district has a high proportion of students whose first language is not English. It was estimated by one principal that 50 to 70 percent of his students are not native speakers of English. Many of these students are bilingual and most are Hispanic, but there is also a significant number of students from Southeast Asia.

The Hartford School Board has made preparation for the SAT a priority. The kit is used in one of several test-preparation programs in the district; that program was described as the most significant one. The program using the kit involves small groups of 10 to 15 students who participate in a one-semester, 18-week course. Sessions run for 45 minutes each day. Nine weeks are devoted to SAT verbal preparation and nine weeks to mathematics preparation. Most students take the course on a pass/fail basis, for which they receive half a credit toward graduation. The course is open to all students who express interest in college. The kit, along with other College Board–provided materials such as *10 SATs*, is the major resource. One teacher described the kit as being so "self-contained" that a teacher isn't necessary. Approximately 44 students in the three district high schools had taken the course during the first semester of the 1986–87 academic year. School staff administered a questionnaire to students who had participated in the program. According to the program coordinators, students said that the course was valuable in helping them gain familiarity with test procedures. As one staff member commented, "The kids are firm believers that it's helping."

The California districts selected represent quite different contexts with respect to (*a*) distinguishing characteristics of the school and the community, (*b*) structure and focus of the programs in which the kit was used, and (*c*) ways the kit was used. The Long Beach Unified School District program, for instance, was conducted at a high school in a predominantly blue-collar section of the city. According to the proposal for Tanner funding, students at this high school are generally from low-income families. Parents typically have no more than a high school education and "single-parent households are a way of life." A plurality of students are white (41 percent), but there are significant percentages of black (28 percent), Hispanic (16 percent), and Asian/Filipino (14 percent) students. Few students (5 to 6 percent, with an even lower percentage for minorities) go on to four-year colleges, and very few students take the SAT.

The Long Beach program concentrated primarily on ninth and tenth graders, but other college preparatory activities were planned at the eleventh- and twelfth-grade levels. Some 260 ninth and tenth graders participated in a wide variety of college preparatory activities during the 1986–87 academic year, including a workshop on study skills, advice on the selection of college preparatory courses, discussions of career aspirations and career choices, visits to a college campus, and review of topics covered on the PSAT/NMSQT.

Gilroy High School is located in a rural area south of San Jose. As described in its Tanner proposal, the community has two distinct populations with quite different needs: One is composed of the newly arrived, high-tech families supported by the Silicon Valley. The other is made up of the families employed in agriculture. Hispanic students represent about 40 percent of the 2,000-plus student population.

A major component of Gilroy's effort to increase the number of college-bound students is a greater emphasis on counseling. This has entailed creation of a counseling position to enable identification of academically promising Hispanic students. In an effort to encourage SAT test-taking, the high school has been made a testing center; students no longer need to travel 25 to 30 miles to take the test. Previously, only about 20 percent of Gilroy students took the SAT.

At Gilroy proposed project activities for the first year involved identifying promising ninth- and tenth-grade Hispanic students on the basis of scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Field trips were scheduled to campuses so students could learn about college systems and admissions requirements. Students were encouraged to take the PSAT/NMSQT, and the SAT preparation course was offered to all students. Parents were offered courses about various aspects of college admissions, and teachers were trained in understanding the SAT.

The San Diego County District operated its college preparatory program at Clairemont High School, which has a minority student enrollment of 52 percent. According to the district's Tanner proposal, 43 percent of students are enrolled in English as a second language, bilingual, or special education programs. Nonetheless, 55 percent of students enroll in college (25 percent in four-year institutions).

The program at Clairemont has been in operation for some five years, and has been cited by the National Council of Teachers of English for its effectiveness. One emphasis is frequent, repeated taking of the SAT. About a third of the full-year course is devoted to test preparation, which includes familiarizing students with the test as well as instruction directed at increasing reading speed and comprehension, among other aspects. By the time students complete their senior year, they have received the equivalent of a full year of preparation, having been in the program for a total of four years.

The San Diego project is very comprehensive in that it includes aspects for teachers, students, and parents. For example, students receive instruction in college-entry-level reading, writing, mathematics, and science in programs developed by area college professors; regular sessions for teachers are conducted to develop learning environments appropriate for culturally diverse students; college tutors are available; and the role of parents is specified in formal "contracts" with the program. Thus, the kit plays a somewhat less important role here than in other settings.

The project in Fresno is an effort by a consortium of four rural school districts in Fresno County, headed by one of the districts—the Central Unified School District. Two of the high schools in this district provided data for the study. In one school, the majority of students are white, but about a third are Hispanic and small percentages are black (3 percent) or Asian (3 percent). Typically, fewer than 25 percent of students take the SAT. In a recent senior class of 175, only 6 students enrolled at four-year postsecondary schools. The other district school that provided data has had its college-bound population quadruple over the past four years. Still, only about 16 percent of its students pursue postsecondary study. The percentage of students who take college admission tests is proportionately low.

The program at these schools employs one full-time staff member, who rotates among the five participating schools. Ninth- and tenth-grade students meet for 50 minutes once a week to discuss various test-taking strategies. English and mathematics teachers are provided with test-preparation materials for use during their classes. In addition to the kit, *10 SATs*, *TestSense*, and materials developed by a test preparation consultant are used, among others. Most of the students in the two schools that participated in our study are Hispanic, 89 percent in one and 82 percent in the other.

Evaluations by Counselors and Teachers

As explained earlier, eight staff members who used the kit in test-preparation programs responded to our request for information. Five of the respondents perceived the kit to be "the single most important component" in their school's test-preparation program; two others viewed it as "one of several important components"; and one saw it as only "a minor component." Seven of eight found it "very easy" to use and the other found it "somewhat easy" to use. For six of the eight respondents, the kit fit "very well" into the program, and the other two rated it as fitting in "somewhat well." All eight found that the kit was flexible.

Counselors and teachers agreed nearly unanimously that the kit was very helpful in teaching students to follow test directions, gain an overview of test content and format, and guess wisely. All who used it rated the components dealing with the verbal items as "very

helpful." Three of four instructors who taught the mathematics components rated those sections as "very helpful," and one teacher rated them as "somewhat helpful." Other areas were rated slightly less positively, although each was considered, on average, to be between "very helpful" and "somewhat helpful." These components covered how to prepare physically and mentally for a test, budgeting time, handling test anxiety, and understanding areas of strength and weakness.

Almost all staff members seemed to perceive the practice tests as the most useful component of the kit, followed by the review of math concepts. The material on cognates and test anxiety and the filmstrip/cassette frequently were not used and received mixed ratings. Instruction on filling in the answer sheet was found to be "very useful" by some but "not useful" by others, probably because many students knew this material already. In terms of increasing students' confidence to try the test, five of the seven staff members who responded to this question believed that the kit led to "a moderate increase in the number of students" who would take the test, and two believed that the increase was "substantial."

Three staff members responded to the open-ended section on how to improve the kit. Their suggestions included: (1) expanding the guessing strategy section; (2) adding more practice handouts for each section (which would facilitate measuring student gains); (3) grouping mathematics items according to the kind and level of mathematics involved (e.g., arithmetic, algebra 1, geometry 2); and (4) possibly incorporating additional items in supplementary material so the basic kit would not be bulky. Most indicated that nothing should be deleted; rather, kit users should be free to decide what to use.

One individual explained that "the problem with the cognate section is that most of our Hispanics can't *read* Spanish. I wouldn't take it out, but it is of limited use." Another commented: "For most of our students taking this course, I could spend the *entire* time just reviewing [math concepts]. But then they get bored because they say they've 'had' this already . . . I've found that most students want to get right to the test as soon as the course begins. I've tried that and, *after* the test, have gone back to the kit." One mentioned that: "It was a good program. It was easy for the students to use and gave them a good view of the test." Another said: "I feel the kit is useful for all students—not just the Hispanic youngster. The kit is nicely put together. It has been a lifesaver."

Evaluations by Students

Description of Student Sample

Tables 1 and 2 list the grade level, sex, race/ethnicity, and language background of the 127 students responding to the questionnaire. The greatest number of respondents were from California. Unfortunately, only four

Table 1. Breakdown of Sample by Grade and Gender

		*School**						
	(N)	*1 (9)*	*2 (11)*	*3 (28)*	*4 (35)*	*5 (40)*	*6 (4)*	*Total (127)*
Grade								
Ninth	N	4	9	—	3	1	—	17
	%	44	82	—	9	2	—	13
Tenth	N	5	2	15	18	39	—	79
	%	56	18	56	51	98	—	63
Eleventh	N	—	—	12	12	—	4	28
	%	—	—	44	34	—	100	22
Twelfth	N	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
	%	—	—	—	6	—	—	2
No Response	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Sex								
Male	N	3	6	9	12	12	—	42
	%	33	55	32	34	30	—	33
Female	N	6	5	19	23	28	4	85
	%	67	45	68	66	70	100	67

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

*School Key:
1—Central High School, Fresno, California
2—Kerman High School, Fresno, California
3—Gilroy High School, Gilroy, California
4—Clairemont High School, San Diego, California
5—Jordan High School, Long Beach, California
6—Hartford High School, Hartford, Connecticut

Table 2. Breakdown of Sample by Race/Ethnicity and Language Background

		School*						
	(N)	1 (9)	2 (11)	3 (28)	4 (35)	5 (40)	6 (4)	Total (127)
Race Ethnicity								
Mexican American	N	3	9	22	15	1	—	50
	%	33	82	81	43	3	—	39
Puerto Rican	N	—	—	—	—	—	4	4
	%	—	—	—	—	—	100	3
Other Hispanic	N	2	1	4	4	1	—	12
	%	22	9	15	11	3	—	9
Subtotal Hispanic	N	5	10	26	19	2	4	66
	%	56	91	96	54	5	100	52
Non-Hispanic White	N	4	1	1	7	20	—	33
	%	44	9	4	20	50	—	26
Black	N	—	—	—	3	6	—	9
	%	—	—	—	9	15	—	7
Asian American	N	—	—	—	6	9	—	15
	%	—	—	—	17	23	—	12
Native American	N	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
	%	—	—	—	—	8	—	2
Language Spoken Other than English								
None	N	4	2	3	4	22	—	35
	%	44	18	11	11	55	—	28
Spanish	N	5	9	23	25	14	4	80
	%	56	82	85	71	35	100	63
Other	N	—	—	1	6	4	—	11
	%	—	—	4	17	10	—	9
No Response	N	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Language Dominance								
Communicate well only in English	N	6	3	7	3	25	—	44
	%	67	27	26	9	64	—	35
English best but can communicate in other language	N	3	8	15	17	9	3	55
	%	33	73	56	49	23	75	44
Both languages equal	N	—	—	5	14	5	1	25
	%	—	—	19	40	13	25	20
Other language best	N	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
	%	—	—	—	3	—	—	1
No Response	N	—	—	1	—	1	—	2

Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

*School Key:
1—Central High School, Fresno, California
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5—Jordan High School, Long Beach, California
6—Hartford High School, Hartford, Connecticut

participants from Hartford responded to the questionnaire. These students were retained in the sample, despite their small number, because they were the only Puerto Rican students in the study.

The respondents were mostly ninth and tenth graders. Two-thirds of them were female. Hispanic students, predominantly Mexican American, constituted more than half the sample. The non-Hispanic white and Asian subsamples were the second and third largest groups. There were also nine black and three Native American students. The 127 respondents represented about 15% of the approximately 800 students who participated in the programs.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they had a background in Spanish, but only one student said that a language other than English was his or her best language. Cross-tabulation of the two language questions for Spanish-background students re-

vealed that 72 percent said English was their best language, 28 percent answered that they could communicate well in both languages, and none responded that Spanish was their best language. (The individual whose best language was not English was therefore most likely Asian American.)

Increase in the Number of Students Planning to Take the PSAT/NMSQT

The main purposes of the evaluation were to determine whether students became more confident and less anxious about test-taking after experience with the test-familiarization kit, and whether this encouraged them to go on to take the PSAT/NMSQT or SAT. Three questions in the student questionnaire addressed these issues.

Questionnaire Item 6 asked how helpful the program was in helping students learn how to handle their nervousness. The average rating for this item ranged from 1.50 (Jordan High School, Long Beach) to 2.09 (for Kerman High School, Fresno) with an overall mean of 1.80, which places this item between "very helpful" (value of 1) and "somewhat helpful" (value of 2). Thus, most students believed that they were better able to cope with their anxieties about test-taking after the course. The rating might have been even more favorable if the unit on test anxiety had been used more frequently by instructors.

Students also were asked the following questions: "Do you think you will take the PSAT/NMSQT next year?" and "If you had *not* participated in the test preparation program at your school this year, do you think you would have taken the PSAT/NMSQT?" The cross-tabulated responses to these two questions are shown in Table 3.

We found that of 118 students who answered both questions, 101 students (86 percent) indicated that they would "probably" or "definitely" take the PSAT/NMSQT, as compared to 68 (58 percent) who said they would have taken it even if they had not participated. Thus, there was a net increase of 33 (28 percent) in the number of students planning to take the PSAT/NMSQT after exposure to the kit and to other test-preparation activities.

Naturally, these increases came mostly from students who were uncertain initially about taking the test, or from those previously unlikely to take the test. The cross-tabulated responses to the two questions show that, of the 23 who were uncertain about taking the test before having experience with the kit, 20 (87 percent) answered that they would definitely or probably take the test, whereas only 2 (9 percent) remained uncertain, and 1 (4 percent) would definitely not take the test. Of the 27 who indicated that they would "probably not" or "definitely not" have taken the test before experience with the kit, 18 (67 percent) answered that they would "probably" or "definitely" take the test, 5 (19 percent) were "uncertain," and 4 (15 percent) indicated that they would "definitely not" take the test. Overall, exactly half of the 118 students changed to a more confident, positive outlook toward taking the test (i.e., their responses are in the cells above the diagonal of the table) whereas only 10 (8 percent) changed to a more tentative approach to taking the test (cells below the diagonal of the table), and 42 percent remained the same (diagonal cells). Thus, these results imply that the test-taking kit and other program activities were very successful in increasing students' confidence about taking the PSAT/NMSQT.

How New Was the Information in the Kit?

One of our concerns was whether the kit covered new ground for students, or simply repeated material they already knew, particularly in components dealing with

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation of Likelihood of Taking PSAT/NMSQT before and after Exposure to Test-Preparation Kit

Do you think you will take the test next year?	*Do you think you would have taken the test next year* without *preparation?*						
	Definitely yes	*Probably yes*	*Uncertain*	*Probably not*	*Definitely not*	*Total*	*No Response "before"*
Definitely yes	35	16	13	8	5	77	5
Probably yes	3	9	7	5	—	24	—
Uncertain	1	—	2	4	1	8	—
Probably not	1	1	—	—	—	2	—
Definitely not	1	1	1	1	3	7	—
Total	41	27	23	18	9	118	
No Response "after"	—	—	—	—	—		4

Note: Table entries indicate the number of students making each pair of responses when asked whether they thought they (a) would take the test next year and (b) *would have* taken the test next year if they had *not* participated in the test-preparation program.

general test-taking skills. Chart 1 shows the percentage of students who responded that they already knew the material in the first 11 items of the evaluation instrument. The items are classified into three groups in the chart: general test-taking (Q1–Q9), Spanish cognates (Q10), and mathematics instruction (Q11). (The coding corresponds to the questions in the student questionnaire, Appendix B.) The chart is an inside-out display in which the possible values for ratings (1–3) are shown on the left in intervals of 0.1. The item-identification number (Q1–Q17) is placed in the interval representing the percentage of those who already knew the material corresponding to that item. Like a graph, this chart shows the differences in the percentage of students who were not familiar with the content of the questionnaire items.

Chart 1 shows that, in general, most of the content was new to the great majority of students. Only one item—Q4, evaluating instruction on "how to mark the answer sheet properly"—was familiar to more than 50 percent of the students before experience with the kit. The percentages of students who already knew the content mentioned in the other items ranged from 2 percent to 19.5 percent. These figures indicate that most material was new to most of the group. Some components presented information that was new to more than 95 percent of the students. These were units covering the purpose of each kind of question (Q5), the meaning of test scores (Q8), and ways to approach different questions (Q9). Instruction on the best use of time (Q1), knowing when to guess (Q2), test directions (Q3), and math concepts and symbols (Q11) was also relatively new to more than 90 percent of the students. Although somewhat more familiar to students, the units on strengths and weaknesses (Q7), how to handle nervousness (Q6), and how to understand Spanish cognates (Q10) also provided information that was new to more than 80 percent of the students. The content in these units was more familiar to those students who said that they could communicate fairly well in Spanish.

Chart 1. Percentage of Total Sample Who Knew Content Areas before Exposure to Kit (Inside-Out Display)

Intervals of % Who Knew Already	*General Test-Taking*	*Math Concepts*	*Use of Spanish Cognates*
0–4.5	Q5, Q8, Q9		
4.6–9.5	Q1, Q2, Q3	Q11	
9.6–14.5	Q7		Q10*
14.6–19.5	Q6		Q10†
19.6–24.5			
24.6–29.5			
29.6–34.5			
34.6–39.5			
39.6–44.5			
44.6–49.5			
49.6–54.5	Q4		
54.6–59.5			
59.6–100.0			

*Total sample.

†Spanish-speaking subsample.

Mean Student Ratings for Content Items

The ratings for each content item were averaged twice, once for the full sample (i.e., including those who already knew the material covered in that item), and again for only those for whom the material was new. These means are presented in Charts 2 and 3 as an inside-out display in which questionnaire identification numbers (Q1–Q17) are placed in intervals corresponding to their mean ratings.

For the complete sample, the responses of students who said that they already knew the item material before exposure to the kit (value of 4) were recoded to a value of 3 ("not helpful"). Chart 2 shows that all items received mean ratings between 1.3 and 2.2 in the total sample, indicating that the content covered in the course was either "very helpful" (value of 1) or "somewhat helpful" (value of 2) for most students. The most favorable ratings were found for content covering guessing strategies (Q2), test directions (Q3), meaning of scores (Q8), approaching different kinds of questions (Q9), and how to answer questions on analogies and antonyms (Q12 and Q13). Slightly less favorable ratings were found for instruction on the purpose of test questions (Q5), budgeting time (Q1), knowing one's strengths and weaknesses (Q7), sentence completion (Q14), reading-passage questions (Q15), mathematics questions (Q16, Q17), and mathematics concepts (Q11).

The least favorable mean ratings were found for instruction on handling nervousness (Q6), marking the answer sheet (Q4), and using Spanish cognates (Q10). These content units were more familiar, as shown in the previous chart. When we restricted the evaluation of the Spanish cognates unit to those students with a background in Spanish, we found a nearly identical mean for this group and the total sample (2.168 for the total sample and 2.175 for those who could communicate in Spanish). While the mean ratings for these three areas (nervousness, marking answer sheets, Spanish cognates) were somewhat less favorable than ratings for the other areas, the units nevertheless received a positive endorsement. The mean rating indicated that, on average, these areas were "somewhat helpful" to the students.

When we excluded those who already knew the item material before the course, the mean ratings (Chart 3) became more favorable by 0.1 or 0.2 for most items. Also, the ordering of items was somewhat different. The most notable change was for Q4 (marking the answer sheet). Among the 49 percent of students who

Chart 2. Mean Ratings by Item for Total Sample (Inside-Out Display)

	Intervals of Mean Ratings	*General Test-Taking Skills*	*Verbal Section*	*Mathematical Section*	*Use of Spanish Cognates*
Very Helpful	1.0–1.09				
	1.1–1.19				
	1.2–1.29				
	1.3–1.39	Q8, Q9	Q13		
	1.4–1.49	Q2, Q3	Q12		
	1.5–1.59	Q5	Q15	Q16	
	1.6–1.69	Q1, Q7	Q14	Q11, Q17	
	1.7–1.79				
	1.8–1.89				
	1.9–1.99				
Somewhat Helpful	2.0–2.09	Q6			
	2.1–2.19	Q4			Q10*,Q10†
	2.2–2.29				
	2.3–2.39				
	2.4–2.49				
	2.5–2.59				
Not Helpful	3.0				

*Spanish-speaking subsample. †Total sample.

did not know the material beforehand, the average rating for this unit was 1.27 (closest to "very helpful") in contrast to a rating of 2.14 for all students.

Means of Student Ratings by Content Areas

To examine whether there were overall differences in the usefulness of specific content areas, the items in the evaluation questionnaire were grouped into four scales: General Test-Taking Skills (Q1–Q9), Verbal Content (Q12–Q15), Math Content (Q16–17, Q11), and total (Q1–Q9, Q11–Q17). Because the scales included different numbers of items, the score on each was divided by the number of items in that scale. To test whether any portion of the kit was rated as more useful than others, a repeated-measures analysis of variance was run on the scale means. This analysis revealed a significant differ-

Chart 3. Mean Ratings of Each Item by Students for Whom the Material Was New (Inside-Out Display)

	Intervals of Mean Ratings	*General Test-Taking Skills*	*Verbal Section*	*Mathematical Section*	*Use of Spanish Cognates*
Very Helpful	1.0–1.09				
	1.1–1.19				
	1.2–1.29	Q4			
	1.3–1.39	Q2,Q3,Q8,Q9	Q13		
	1.4–1.49	Q1	Q12		
	1.5–1.59	Q5, Q7	Q15	Q11,Q16	
	1.6–1.69		Q14	Q17	
	1.7–1.79				
	1.8–1.89	Q6			
	1.9–1.99				
Somewhat Helpful	2.0–2.09				Q10*,Q10†
	2.1–2.19				
	2.2–2.29				
	2.3–2.39				
	2.4–2.49				
	2.5–2.59				
	2.6–2.69				
	2.7–2.79				
	2.8–2.89				
	2.9–2.99				
Not Helpful	3.0				

*Spanish-speaking subsample. †Total subsample.

ence among scales. The means for the three scales and the total sample are presented at the bottom of Chart 4. It can be seen that, overall, the most favorable ratings were found for the verbal-content units, with no differences between the mathematics-content and the general test-taking units.

Group Differences in Student Means for Content Areas

We also examined whether there were any statistically significant differences in the evaluation of the kit by various groups. For each of the three scale scores discussed above, analyses of the variance were run to test the differences between males and females, among race/ethnic groups, among different language groups, and among grades. Because of the large number of comparisons that were made, we set the significance level at .01.

We found no significant differences between males and females on any of the scales, but there were three marginally significant differences ($p \leq .04$) on the General Test-Taking Scale among students of different language backgrounds and grades, and on the Mathematics scale among race/ethnic groups and language groups. The means for these scales are also shown in Chart 4.

It appears that students who could communicate equally well in two languages (balanced bilinguals) found the material on general test-taking skills more useful than did the others. Not surprisingly, the ninth graders, who can be expected to have the least experience taking tests, perceived the information on general test-taking skills to be more helpful than did the older students.

As for the mathematics-content units, Asian American students evaluated them as more helpful than did the other students, but the balanced bilinguals found the mathematics units slightly less helpful than did other students.

Free-Response Evaluations

In addition to the structured questions, the questionnaire included a free-response section to allow students to express their opinions about the program and to make suggestions for improvements. Many students in-

Chart 4. Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Scales Corresponding to Different Content Areas by Grade Level, Language Background, and Race/Ethnicity

		General Test-Taking Scale		*Verbal Section*		*Mathematical Section*		*Total**	
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Grade									
Ninth	9–16	1.48	.17	1.48	.31	1.72	.38	1.50	.16
Tenth	75–78	1.63	.38	1.48	.37	1.57	.48	1.58	.33
Eleventh	27–28	1.55	.32	1.45	.41	1.62	.55	1.53	.27
Language Background									
Can communicate well in:									
English only	41–44	1.59	.38	1.42	.38	1.55	.47	1.53	.34
Both, but English better	47–53	1.65	.36	1.48	.38	1.58	.53	1.59	.31
Both languages equally	23–25	1.53	.29	1.56	.33	1.74	.40	1.57	.24
Race/Ethnicity									
Asian American	14–15	1.63	.42	1.40	.31	1.53	.50	1.54	.37
Mexican American	42–49	1.58	.34	1.55	.38	1.62	.46	1.58	.29
Other Hispanic	12	1.51	.23	1.50	.35	1.58	.36	1.52	.22
Non-Hispanic White	30–33	1.65	.40	1.42	.38	1.58	.53	1.57	.35
Total Sample	114–125	1.61	.37	1.48	.37	1.61	.49	1.57	.32

Note: Only groups having at least 10 members are reported separately. All groups are included in the total sample means. *N* is given as a range since not all respondents answered each question. The scale units are in the same units as the original item ratings. That is, the mean scale score is the average rating for items in that content area. A rating of "1" = "very helpful," "2" = "somewhat helpful," and "3" = "not helpful."

*Excludes ratings for Spanish-language cognates.

dicated that they liked the whole program and saw no need for improvement. Several themes emerged from the specific feedback in reference to the kit itself.

The Test Preparation Kit. The most common theme (about 65 comments) concerned the advantage students had gained in general test-taking. Most respondents (39) commented on the value of exposure to and practice with the test. Others praised units on strategies and approaches to questions (16), eliminating wrong choices and guessing (5), budgeting time (3), and dealing with nervousness (2).

The second most common category of comments concerned preparation for the verbal test (18 remarks), which many found useful and interesting. For example, one student at Hartford said, "I really enjoyed the English and grammar that I learned." Many referred to analogies (7); other comments were fairly evenly distributed among reading passages (3), the general English section and grammar (3), and antonyms and synonyms (2). One student at Clairemont High in San Diego revealed, "before [the program] I didn't know how to tell the difference between [antonyms and synonyms]."

The third most common group of remarks (12) referred to the support that the program provided through workshops, the camaraderie of group meetings, and individual attention from instructors. Students at Gilroy High said, "Our adviser was constantly making sure we were on track," and the best part was the "encouragement of taking classes for college."

Eight comments mentioned the self-knowledge students gained with regard to gaps in their background and how to plan their studies for college preparation. For example, one student at Clairemont High said the program was valuable in "reevaluating basic skills and learning what I missed in elementary school." A few students (6) also commented on how valuable the mathematics review had been, especially for geometry and algebra.

In terms of improving the kit, students generally wanted more: more classes over a longer period of time (17 comments), more practice tests (4 comments), more exercises, more detail on math, more vocabulary and reading, etc. Several thought that the mathematics section could be more varied and entertaining. One suggested having more reading passages but shorter and simpler practice sheets.

Other Program Characteristics. Students also commented on aspects of the programs that went beyond the kit, for example, material on college applications or visits to college campuses. These components were very enthusiastically received. At least eight students mentioned how much they had profited from the information on the application process. One student at Central High in Fresno pointed out that before the program she "didn't even know there [were] college entrance exams." Nine students from Long Beach and nine from Gilroy thought that the best part was the college visits, and seven wanted more college visits incorporated into the program.

DISCUSSION

In general, staff and students agreed that the test-preparation programs had high-quality materials and provided much new information. Students and staff also agreed that the practice tests were particularly valuable and that more of them should be included in the kit. Staff members predicted a modest to substantial increase in the number of students taking the PSAT/NMSQT. This prediction was corroborated by students' responses. Those who were uncertain beforehand about taking the test became substantially more likely to attempt the test. For the total sample, the net increase in the likelihood of taking the test was modest (28 percent) only because the majority of students (58 percent) were already planning to take it.

Teachers and counselors placed more emphasis on the helpfulness of the math section than did students; the latter seemed to be more enthusiastic about the verbal content. All content units were rated favorably, but those with means closest to "somewhat helpful" (2) rather than "very helpful" (1) were often those components that instructors reported were used least, such as the material on handling nervousness. It is not clear whether these materials were sometimes omitted because they were not as good as other units, or whether they were rated less favorably simply because they weren't covered.

One teacher's comments shed light on why instruction on Spanish cognates was not received more favorably. Apparently, when students reported that they communicated well in Spanish, they were often referring to oral, not written, communication. According to the teacher, many students could not read Spanish well. Perhaps the cognates unit will be most helpful for recent immigrants and for students residing in Puerto Rico who have had more formal schooling in Spanish.

The most salient recommendation from students was to extend the program, both in terms of length and materials. It is apparent from their comments that many students viewed the course as an opportunity to improve their problem-solving and other skills, and not just as a chance to gain test experience. Apparently, for the first time, many students became aware of gaps in their schooling; they frequently remarked on the need for more time for remediation. Hence, instituting programs such as these as early as possible in high school

might be a practical way of demonstrating to students their need for more college preparatory courses. Furthermore, the students' enthusiasm for both group and tutorial support suggests that many would probably have had difficulty with independent study.

Finally, it is necessary to repeat what this study could not, and was not intended to, accomplish. This study was not a rigorous formal evaluation of the kit. The kit was already being used when the evaluation commenced, and targeted districts offered a wide variety of other activities designed to improve students' facility with test-taking and interest in college admission. Thus, it is not possible to attribute any effects directly to the introduction of the kit. Results, however, do suggest a positive effect.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A kit containing materials intended to familiarize Hispanic students with the PSAT/NMSQT was developed by the College Board, ETS, and the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition.* This report provides some data on the extent to which the kit's objectives were achieved at some of the sites in which it has been used. Reactions to the kit were obtained from both staff and students. A number of these comments should have value in planning the final revision and distribution of the kit.

The schools chosen for study were diverse, as were their approaches to test preparation. This diversity was useful in assessing one of the kit's objectives—sufficient flexibility for use in various instructional settings, with many different approaches, schedules, and instructors. There was every indication that the kit is indeed usable in diverse settings.

The material in the kit was regarded as "new" by a large majority of responding students. This finding would seem to reinforce the original concept and purpose of the kit, which was based on the assumption that Hispanic students may not be as familiar as other students with standardized tests. This lack was thought to negatively affect Hispanic students' decisions to take college admissions tests.

The results of this evaluation show that, in conjunction with other test-preparation activities, the test-familiarization kit elicited an extremely positive response from students and staff members. Average student ratings for 17 content objectives fell closest to "very helpful" for 6 items, about halfway between "very helpful" and "somewhat helpful" for 8 items, and closest to "somewhat helpful" for 3 items. The material covered, with the exception of instruction on how to mark the answer sheet, was novel to most students. (About half the students reported that they already knew how to mark the answers.) However, those students who did not know how to mark the answer sheet beforehand rated the instruction on answer sheets very favorably.

Overall, the instruction on the verbal section of the test, particularly the analogies and antonym questions, was rated as the most helpful by students. Some of the units on general test-taking skills—the topics covering guessing strategies, meaning of test scores, and approaches to different question types—were also very favorably received. Although all units on average were perceived as at least "somewhat helpful," instruction on coping with nervousness and using Spanish cognates was rated less favorably than was the other instruction. This was probably because the former was omitted by some instructors and, in the latter case, few students were proficient in reading Spanish.

Although the evidence is limited to open-ended remarks made by some students, certain responses support the appropriateness of the instructional methodology on which the kit is based. There were indications that students were often able to evaluate their own skills and, as a result, to seek help in areas in which they were deficient. The students found the instructional methodology, i.e., group instruction and peer support, effective.

Finally, there is very clear evidence that the kit seems to meet its most important objective, i.e., increasing the likelihood of students taking the PSAT/NMSQT. Eighty-seven percent of students who were previously uncertain about taking the test indicated that they would "probably" or "definitely" take the PSAT/NMSQT after the course. Overall, there was a net increase of 28 percent (from 58 to 86 percent) in the number of students who were "probably" or "definitely" planning to take the PSAT/NMSQT. Of the 118 responding students, 50 percent had a more positive outlook, 42 percent remained the same, and only 10 percent became more tentative about taking the PSAT/NMSQT after using the kit material.

There is relatively strong evidence that programs involving the use of the test-familiarization kit can successfully encourage disadvantaged students to take the PSAT/NMSQT. In turn, more of these students may enter the higher-education pipeline. Students' comments suggested that not only their test-taking but also their problem-solving and language skills improved after use of the kit materials, which may lead to real improvement in their college preparedness. Often, after exposure to the kit, students were encouraged to pursue further study and get help in areas where they

*The kit is currently titled *Testskills: For Teachers of Hispanic Students* and is available from ETS, Box 6721, Princeton, N.J. 08541-6721.

were academically weak. Hence, the kit can serve as a catalyst in college-preparation courses to expand the pool of college applicants drawn from groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education. College administrators and secondary school counselors seem to have another tool to use (e.g., in high school courses or precollege programs) in recruiting and preparing students for higher education. Based on this evaluation, the test-preparation kit may be useful not just for Hispanic students, but for all students.

APPENDIX A. THE TEACHER/COUNSELOR QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE PRINCETON, N.J. 08541

609-921-9000
CABLE-EDUCTESTSVC
DIVISION OF MEASUREMENT
RESEARCH AND SERVICES

May 1987

Dear Teacher/Counselor:

On behalf of the College Board we are conducting an evaluation of the pilot version of the kit "Preparing for the PSAT/NMSQT for Hispanic High School Students," which you used in conjunction with the test preparation program offered at your school during the past year. We'd like to find out about the ways the kit was used, in what ways it was helpful, and how it might be made even more useful. Could you please give us your reactions by completing this brief questionnaire?

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Don Powers

Donald E. Powers

Maria Pennock-Román

Maria Pennock-Román
Study Directors

DEP:MPR/lc

1. How large a part in your school's test preparation program did the kit "Preparing for the PSAT/NMSQT" play?

The single most important component. 1
One of several important components 2
A minor component. 3

2. How easy was it to use the kit?

Very easy. 1
Somewhat easy 2
Somewhat difficult 3
Very difficult. 4

3. How well did the kit fit in with other components of your test preparation program?

Very well. 1
Somewhat well 2
Somewhat poorly. 3
Very poorly 4
It was the only component. . 5

4. Were you able to use the kit in a flexible manner, i.e., by adding or subtracting material or by using "bits and pieces" as needed? The kit was:

Very flexible. 1
Somewhat flexible 2
Somewhat inflexible. 3
Very inflexible 4

5. How helpful was the kit "Preparing for the PSAT/NMSQT" in achieving each of the following objectives of your test preparation program? Helping students to:

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	Not an objective
Gain an overview of test content and format.	1	2	3	4
Learn how to prepare physically and mentally for a test.	1	2	3	4
Learn the following strategies for test taking:				
Budgeting time.	1	2	3	4
Following directions.	1	2	3	4
Guessing wisely	1	2	3	4
Handling test anxiety	1	2	3	4
Understand and respond efficiently to each of the types of PSAT/NMSQT questions:				
Antonyms.	1	2	3	4
Sentence completion	1	2	3	4
Analogies	1	2	3	4
Reading comprehension	1	2	3	4
Regular math.	1	2	3	4
Quantitative comparisons.	1	2	3	4
Understand the meaning of PSAT/NMSQT scores.	1	2	3	4
Understand areas of strength and weakness.	1	2	3	4

6. How useful was each of the following components of the kit?

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful	Did not use
Filmstrip/cassette program	1	2	3	4
Material on dealing with test anxiety	1	2	3	4
Practice tests	1	2	3	4
Material on cognates.	1	2	3	4
Section on marking answer sheets . .	1	2	3	4
Review of math concepts.	1	2	3	4

7. Do you feel that, as a result of your test preparation program, some students who would not have taken the PSAT/NMSQT (or SAT) may now feel confident enough to try it?

   Yes, a substantial increase in the number of students. . . . 1
   Yes, a moderate increase in the number of students. 2
   Yes, a slight increase in the number of students 3
   Probably no increase. 4

8. Was there anything that you would add to, delete from, or change about the kit?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Do you have any other comments about the kit?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. What is your position at your school?

    Counselor. 1
    Math teacher. 2
    English teacher. 3
    Other 4
    (please specify) _____

11. Name of your school: _____

12. What was your role in the program (for example, taught the math component, etc.)?

_____

_____

Thanks for your help.

APPENDIX B. THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE PRINCETON, N.J. 08541

609-921-9000
CABLE EDUCTESTSVC
DIVISION OF MEASUREMENT
RESEARCH AND SERVICES

May 1987

Dear Student:

During the current school year you participated in a program at your school to help you prepare for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), the test that is usually taken by high school juniors or sophomores prior to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). We at Educational Testing Service would like to get your reactions to the instructional materials that were used in the program in order to make them even better. Will you please help us by completing this questionnaire. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Don Powers
Donald E. Powers

Maria Pennock-Román
Maria Pennock-Román
Study Directors

DEP:MPR/lc

1. How helpful was the program in helping you learn each of the following. (If you could already do any of these things before the program began, please circle "4".):

		Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	I knew this before the program began
Q1	How to make the best use of time available for test taking . .	1	2	3	4
Q2	When to guess and how to attack questions you don't know	1	2	3	4
Q3	Familiarity with the test directions for the PSAT/NMSQT. . .	1	2	3	4
Q4	How to mark the test answer sheet properly	1	2	3	4
Q5	The purpose of each kind of question and the kinds of skills needed to answer them.	1	2	3	4
Q6	How to handle your nervousness . .	1	2	3	4
Q7	What are your stengths and weaknesses	1	2	3	4
Q8	What your test scores mean	1	2	3	4
Q9	How to approach the different kinds of questions	1	2	3	4
Q10	How to use your knowledge of Spanish to understand the meaning of words	1	2	3	4
Q11	What mathematical concepts and symbols you should know.	1	2	3	4

2. How helpful was the program in explaining the following kinds of questions and strategies for answering them?

		Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful
Q12	Antonyms, in which you pick the opposite of a word (for example, the opposite of GOOD is BAD).	1	2	3
Q13	Analogies, in which you find the relationships between words (for example, YAWN: BOREDOM :: SMILE: AMUSEMENT).	1	2	3
Q14	Sentence completions, in which you identify missing words (for example, "Unfortunately _ _ _ _ in one field does not _ _ _ _ success in another.").	1	2	3
Q15	Reading passages followed by questions about them	1	2	3
Q16	Mathematics questions with 5 choices dealing with algebra, geometry, or arithmetic.	1	2	3
Q17	Mathematics questions in which you compare Column A with Column B	1	2	3

3. Do you think you will take the PSAT/NMSQT next year:

Definitely yes. 1
Probably yes. 2
Uncertain 3
Probably not. 4
Definitely not. 5

4. If you had not participated in the test preparation program at your school this year, do you think you would have taken the PSAT/NMSQT next year:

Definitely yes. 1
Probably yes. 2
Uncertain 3
Probably not. 4
Definitely not. 5

5. What is your sex?

Male. 1
Female. 2

6. What is your current grade in school?

9th. 1
10th 2
11th 3
12th 4

7. What is your ethnic background?

American Indian. 1
Asian American 2
Black or Afro American 3
Mexican American or Chicano. 4
Puerto Rican 5
Other Hispanic/Latino. 6
(e.g., Cuban American, Salvadoran, Venezuelan)
White. 7

8. In what language other than English can you communicate?

None 1
Spanish. 2
Other. 3
(please specify) _____

9. Which statement best describes your language background:

I communicate well only in English. 1
English is my best language but I can also communicate in another language. 2
I communicate about equally well in English and another language 3
A language other than English is my best language 4

10. What was the best part of the program for you?

_____

_____

_____

11. Is there anything that would have made the program better?

_____

_____

_____

Thanks for your help.